A CROWN OF TRIBULATION

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Being Meditations on the Seven Sorrows of Our Blessed Lady Mary

BY

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The First Sorrow

THE SWORD PREDICTED BY SIMEON

Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword.—Psalm xxi. 21.

He will crown her with a crown of tribulation.—Isaias xxii. 18.

OUR Blessed Lady received her first dolour in the Temple of Jerusalem, in the house of God. St. Luke tells us that after the days of purification, according to the Mosaic Law, were accomplished, Mary and Joseph journeyed from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to present the Infant Jesus formally to the Lord that the command might be fulfilled: "Every male child opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." According to the Levitical Canons the rite of purification was followed by an expiatory sacrifice which might be either a lamb, one year old, or two turtle doves, or two pigeons.

In order, then, that the law might be fulfilled, Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph made the journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem though, as the Virgin-Mother of the Son of God, it was quite unnecessary that she should submit to the cleansing rite imposed upon the mothers of Israel. With fervent gratitude Our Lady apprized the signal favour conferred upon her by God in permitting her to bring into this world, in immaculate purity, Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God. She was Mother and Virgin in one; unspotted and unstained. "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Isaias vii. 14). And Mary knew the wondrous miracle wrought in her. She had surrendered her body to her Creator that His Will and His purpose might be effected in her: "She conceived by the Holy Ghost." "May it be done unto me according to Thy word." "And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt in her." In radiant purity Mary became the Mother of the Son of God; and in overwhelming gratitude could exclaim: "He that is mighty hath done great things to me"; yet in humility and lowliness of spirit she submitted to the enactments of the Jewish Law lest, perchance, by not complying

with them, scandal might be given to those around her.

"And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord."

At the moment Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph entered the Temple to present Our Lord to His Eternal Father, Simeon was guided by the Holy Spirit to enter also, and his gaze fell upon the Holy Family. There was nothing to the casual observer to mark them out from the ordinary pilgrims frequenting the Temple save their air of piety and recollection. They were poorer, perhaps, than most; but with prophetic insight Simeon had marked the sinless Babe in His Mother's arms; the purity of the Mother; the quiet dignity and simple faith of the Foster-Father; and hastened forward to meet them, exclaiming in love and gratitude: "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation."

Simeon's hour had come; and the "Desired of all nations" was in his arms, for this helpless Babe was the Omnipotent God. The clouds of darkness which had enveloped the earth for so many centuries were swept aside; here in his arms was the "Light of the world"; the "Glory of Israel"; here was the Redeemer of the human race, the long-promised, long-desired Messiah. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen" (Isaias ix. 2). "And there shall come a Redeemer to Sion" (Isaias lix. 20).

No longer need the world be plunged in darkness and desolation; no longer need its inhabitants grieve in sadness and misery of spirit, for here, in this little Child, was the Saviour of the world, the new life given to it, so weary of itself; so tired of its existence; so perplexed with its problems and experiences. "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaias lx. 1).

Here was the World's Salvation; its only Hope; but how could the Most High, the Incomprehensible, the Lord of heaven and earth, enter His own creation

in a stable at Bethlehem, housed with the beasts of the field? How could He be born of a Virgin-Mother, an unknown maiden? How could the world with its intelligence and attainments believe in such abject humiliation? How could it accept the teaching of One who said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven"; of One whose command was: "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you"; of One who said to all: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"; of One whose precept to the world was: "Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you." How could the world, with its accumulated knowledge and philosophy, so far forget itself as to put all these on one side; how could it become simple and elementary again and follow the teaching of a reputed Son of a carpenter; how *could* it embrace the strange, singular maxims of the Nazarene?

And Simeon, seeing all this, and the hard imminent struggle which the world would have in accepting as its Saviour

one who was born as an outcast, and was to die a criminal's death, said to the Mother of the world's Redeemer : " This Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."

" For the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel." The supreme Figure in the world's history has been Jesus Christ. No personality, no teaching, no influence, has ever aroused such fierce, unintermittent discussion as His. Christianity, brought into the world with His Teaching and His Example, has been at one and the same time the world's Gospel of Hate and the world's Sacrament of Love. It has been the great dividing force, the great means of separation between nation and nation ; the barrier, the obstacle, between kindred and kindred ; the great upheaval in human life, human society. No one has ever had so many bitter enemies as Jesus Christ. No one has ever had so many ardent lovers as He. Jesus Christ has been the most hated, and the most passionately loved figure in the world's history. He has torn the world asunder by the force of His Teaching, by the irresistible power of His

Personality, by His claims upon the hearts of men, by His persistent appeals to follow Him. He speaks—and man breaks his life asunder, as it were. For His sake thousands have given up their lives in cruel warfare; have faced the horrors of infidel persecution in every clime, dying of love for Him whose infinite love for them has evoked, in response, all that is greatest in human nature. Every day the commands of Jesus Christ are lovingly embraced by thousands; not a day, not an hour, passes but they are violated and trampled under foot by His ungrateful children. Every day the enemies of Jesus Christ—the devil, the world, and the flesh—are vanquished and conquered by His grace; every day thousands forsake Him and, going over to the enemy, make a truce with the Evil One, the "Prince of Darkness." Attracted by His wondrous Personality, souls, hearing the Call of Christ, embrace His evangelical counsels and clothe themselves with His Poverty, His Chastity, His Obedience. In the strength of manhood and flower of womanhood they leave all things to follow Him; surrendering all to Him, for Him. Ridiculous and abject in the eyes of the world, they seek

and find Him, in mortification and penance, in humiliation and suffering, for He whom they seek is "Christ *crucified*." Every day, in the ceaseless pursuit of Mammon, Jesus Christ is ignored, denied. The world, in its folly and madness, embraces the tyranny of its passions—its greed and sensuality, its materialism and ungodliness—vainly and pathetically believing itself to be free thereby; knowing nothing of the freedom of Christ's yoke, nothing of the infinite mercy of its Saviour, deaf and insensible to His pleading appeal: "Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (St. Matthew xi. 28). "I am forsaken of many for the sins of my children because they departed from the law of God" (Baruch iv. 12).

"This Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted." "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." Our Blessed Lady entered the Temple in radiant happiness. She left it in sorrow and in grief. She had given up her Child into the arms of Simeon, full of love and gratitude; she received Him back with an aching heart. It grieved the kindly

old Simeon to tell her of the dolorous future which confronted her, of the sorrow which would come upon her, of the severe ordeal through which she would have to pass to testify to an incredulous world her love for Jesus Christ, her Son; her resignation to God's Holy Will and her ardent love for the children of earth. She was so blessed in her wondrous Motherhood; so far removed from sin and suffering. But this beautiful Babe was to become the "Man of Sorrows" one day; He was to become a stumbling-block, a scandal, to His own people and to the world at large; and His Mother must know of it, must be prepared to suffer with Him and for Him; must share His anguish and His woe. "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce." Fain would Simeon have spared Mary this knowledge; but the word of God must be spoken. Mary's share in the Redemption of mankind must be brought before her with all its sacrifice and suffering.

Our Blessed Lady's sorrows began at the very moment the Incarnation was accomplished; but with the delicacy which characterized her in all her sufferings, Mary kept these to herself. Now, at the word of Simeon, they were publicly

announced to her in the Temple of God; the veil which partially hid the future was raised, and she became conscious of all she would have to bear. "He will crown thee with a crown of tribulation" (Isaias xxii. 18).

Would Our Lady rather have known of her life of sorrow, or would she rather have been left in ignorance of what was to come upon her? Would she, as the mother of the "Man of Sorrows," wish to suffer for His sake right from the beginning of His earthly life, or would she rather be spared much of His pain and suffering, and enter into it only in the last scenes of His public life? Ah, who can doubt? As a human being Mary, like everyone else, shrank from suffering, even as her Divine Son did in the Garden of Olives; but she understood better now, perhaps, what it meant to be the Mother of the Incarnate Son of God. To be the Mother of God was to partake of the life of sacrifice of Him who had not whereon to lay His Head. From her veins that Blood was drawn which was destined to flow on Calvary. It was a wonderful privilege to be the Mother of Bethlehem's Babe; it was a far greater, far more wonderful privilege to be the

Mother of Calvary's crucified Christ. Knowing the sorrow which must come upon her through her Child, she loved Him the more—even as human love becomes more exalted, more beautiful, when sanctified by suffering. And who can measure Mary's sorrow from the first moment she heard Simeon's words? Her own life became a moving Calvary; and she understood from then that in every moment of her Son's life He was nearing His Calvary; that she had brought Him into the world for that purpose—that was why the mystery of the Incarnation had been wrought in her; that as she watched over Him with loving care and supplied His material needs, she was but nurturing Him to be the "Man of Sorrows"; that this little Child, resting so peacefully in her arms now, would, one day, be placed there again as the crucified Saviour of the world.

And yet there was not a word or a murmur from Mary as she heard Simeon's prophecy. Perfect in her love for her Child, she was perfect in her submission to Him. Her will was to do His Will; and since His Will was to suffer for the sins of men, Mary's will was to suffer too. She accepted in loving resignation all the

pain which was to come upon her through Him. She did not question it; but opened her heart to sorrow and suffering when she heard Simeon's words, desiring no life apart from Him who was her Child, her Saviour, and her God. "In the head of the book it was written of me that I should do Thy Will; O my God I have desired it, and Thy law in the midst of my heart" (Psalm xxxix. 8-9).

The Second Sorrow

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

O Expectation of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble: why wilt Thou be a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man turning in to lodge?—Jeremias xiv. 8.

THE second dolour of Our Blessed Lady followed very closely upon the first. St. Matthew relates for us, in the second chapter of his Gospel, that the Magi being warned in sleep not to return to Herod, this cruel tyrant at once determined to put to death all the male children under two years, hoping thereby to annihilate the Infant Jesus. "But an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph saying: Arise, and take the Child and His Mother and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him."

"Arise, and take the Child and His Mother and fly into Egypt." What a

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terrible trial for the Mother of God! And yet, what wonderful faith and confidence in Him Mary must have had. She instantly obeyed the command brought her by St. Joseph because she knew it to be the behest of God, though no details of His plans were unfolded to her. There was no revelation on the part of God as to when Mary might hope to return to her own country: "Be in Egypt until I shall tell thee"; nevertheless, she did not hesitate to go, or stop to ponder why God was ordering her to take her Son away from His own people whom He had come to save. Our Lady was always ready to do the Will of God; and so, in the face of the trying ordeal, Mary showed perfect submission and obedience.

She knew, and had fully realized, the *power* of God within her. Was she not the "handmaid of the Lord"? Her confidence in God was never shaken. He had tried her sorely; but He had never forsaken her. Did she not perceive God's power made manifest in her—Virgin and Mother in one? Mary knew that her purity was intensified by the dwelling within her of the Spotless Lamb of God; that her virginity was not diminished in any way by giving birth to a Man-Child.

Our Blessed Lady was perfectly conscious of this; as we, in our sinfulness, can but very imperfectly recognize it. It was the feature which, perhaps, stood out pre-eminently in her spiritual life at that time; and recognizing the special Providence of God in her regard, Mary, with profound humility and love, obeyed the command brought her by St. Joseph.

But the pathos of it! "It will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him." She had suffered day and night since Simeon's words fell upon her ears; had lived in constant dread that some terrible harm would come to her Child; and now she hears that Herod seeks to kill Him. Her mother's heart is torn with anguish as she thinks of the cruel fate awaiting her little Child sleeping so tranquilly near her. Yet she makes the necessary preparations quietly and simply. There is no bustle, no confusion, no repining; and in a few minutes she is ready. With a heart full of pity and love, torn with grief, she takes the Child up in her arms and presses Him against her breast. He clings to her in His pathetic helplessness; and she shelters Him under her mantle from the chill of night, insensible to her own personal discomfort;

and goes forth with Him into exile to save Him from a cruel inhuman death. "Who will give me in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; and I will leave my people and depart from them, because they are all adulterers, an assembly of transgressors" (Jeremias ix. 2).

As Our Blessed Lady travelled along with the Holy Child and St. Joseph, her heart was wrung with sorrow. The cruel, sinister words rang in her ears: "Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him." Already her innocent Babe was an object of hatred to the world; already He was driven out by men because of their evil passions and iniquitous lives. "There was no room for Him in the inn." There was no room for Him in His own country; no room for the Creator of the world amongst His own creatures, His own nation! He must go forth, driven away by those He had come to save. "How happeneth it, O Israel, that thou art in thy enemies' land?" (Baruch iii. 10).

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not"! And we ourselves, have we not repeatedly driven Him out of our lives by our attachments to creatures; by our sins; by our *habits*

of sin? Have we not sent Him far away out of our lives and filled ourselves with the empty, wretched pleasures of this world? Perchance we have tried to live without Him; without whom all is darkness and desolation; apart from whom life is so meaningless and futile. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Oh, the folly of our lives! "Too late have I known Thee, O Ancient Truth; too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new."

As Mary carried her Child into exile in the deathlike stillness of the night, her Motherhood rose in her like a great wave, enveloping her, and she was lost in its tenderness and love. What matter if she felt the fatigue and hardships of the journey if she could only save Him a little from them? What matter if she suffered hunger and thirst if He could get sustenance? What matter if she never closed her weary, tear-stained eyes as long as He slept safely on her breast? "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids" (Psalm cxxxi. 4). What matter if she felt the bitter cold as long as He was warm in the shelter of her arms? What mattered it if her whole body was steeped in pain, if every sense was dulled

by suffering, as long as her Child was spared? What sacrifice on her part could be too great if she could only save this tender Babe some of the pain which, in the future, awaited the "Man of Sorrows"?

Her compassionate heart went out with loving sympathy to those poor mothers in Bethlehem whose babes were to be torn from their breasts and murdered before their very eyes. If she could only ward off the cruel sorrow which was to come upon them! Her eyes turned with affection to St. Joseph walking by her side. She was so grateful to have him with her. He was so silently sympathetic, so patient and resigned to God's Will; yet she knew that he, too, must be suffering; not indeed, as she suffered, but the anxiety and physical strain of the journey must have weighed very heavily upon him. And he was so utterly unselfish. His only thoughts were for her Child, and for her. At the end of that long, sad journey there was the difficulty of finding a suitable dwelling where the Holy Family could live during their time of exile; and Mary felt again the pathos of not having a home, however poor, for her Child. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of

the air their nests, but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His Head" (St. Luke ix. 58).

Tradition has many charming legends in connection with the stay of the Holy Family in Egypt; but the Holy Scriptures, with conspicuous reticence, tell us nothing about their duration in that pagan land. It must have been a very humble dwelling which sheltered them, probably near the frontier of Egypt, as we do not know precisely how long the Holy Family was compelled to remain in exile. But whether long or short, Our Blessed Lady felt acutely the sadness and humiliation of the position. Her Child, St. Joseph and she were exiles in a land of immorality. She viewed with pain and abhorrence the idolatrous practices of the people round about her; the infidelity and ingratitude of the Jews of the Dispersion. The Holy of Holies was compelled to live in this sin-laden atmosphere; the Sinless One was here in the midst of sin. Mary suffered, too, in exile from the non-observation of the Mosaic Law. She missed the public regard for the Sabbath, the visits to the Temple to which she had been accustomed from her childhood. In that pagan land she

could make no friends. She was isolated because of her Child and her own sinlessness. "Friends and neighbours Thou hast put from me, and my acquaintance because of my misery" (Psalm lxxxvii. 19). Every day her mind was full of anxious care as she watched over her Child in that infidel land, not knowing how long it would be her lot to remain there, yet perfectly resigned to God's Holy Will. This second dolour of Our Lady was, in truth, an agonizing one full of mental suffering and physical discomfort, attended by continual harrowing experiences, wounding to the quick the sensitive nature of the Mother of God.

"And He was there until the death of Herod." "Because Israel was a Child and I loved Him, I called My Son out of Egypt" (Osee xi. 1). The time had now come for the Holy Family to return to their own land; and St. Joseph desired that they should settle in Bethlehem, the city of David, where the Child had been born; but being warned in a dream that Archelaus reigned in the place of his father, St. Joseph decided to dwell in Galilee; and they came to a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: "That Jesus should be

called a Nazarite." And in lowliness and poverty He dwelt there with His Virgin-Mother and chaste Foster-Father; this wondrous Child who, one day, was to save His people from their sins; above whose thorn-crowned Head on Calvary's hill was to be written: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"!

The Third Sorrow

THE LOSS OF THE CHILD JESUS FOR THREE DAYS

By night I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him, and found Him not. I will arise and go about the city: in the streets and broad places I will seek Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him, and found Him not. The watchmen who kept the city found me: Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth? I found Him whom my soul loveth; I held Him, and I will not let Him go.—Canticle of Canticles iii. 1-4.

AT the age of twelve, Our Blessed Lord was taken by His Parents to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Passover; and when they returned to their home Jesus remained in Jerusalem and His parents knew it not. "And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him."

Is it possible for us to picture the intense suffering and desolation which the Mother of God endured during the three days' loss of her Son in the city of Jerusalem? We cannot imagine what she must really have suffered in those days of affliction and distress, because we cannot fathom her perfect love for God. The agony of separation is proportionate to the power of love. The more we love our dear ones, the more deep is the sense of loss; and no human being has ever loved, or could ever love, as Mary did. Jesus was all-in-all to her. He was her Child, her Saviour, and her God. She was His beautiful, sinless Mother. Her love was, therefore, the most beautiful the world has ever known. It was the love of the most perfect Mother on earth for her Child, true God and true Man; He, perfect of Himself as the Eternal Son of God; she, perfect because of Him and through Him as the Mother of the Eternal Word.

And yet she must suffer; suffer because of her great love for Him. Was it not her Son who caused her this sorrow? "The Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem and His parents knew it not." Was it not His Hand which planted the sword of sorrows in her breast? This was a

sorrow, directly and personally, put upon her by Himself. "He remained in Jerusalem and His parents knew it not." And yet He knew the suffering He would cause His Mother; knew, as no one else could know, the grief which would encompass her till she beheld Him again. How it must have hurt Him to wound His Mother; how He must have grieved for her day by day, knowing the measure of her love for Him. But His Mother must suffer as no other human being ever suffered; as no other has ever been called upon to suffer; suffer, as the supreme hall-mark of love. In every stage of her Son's life; in His Infancy, in His Boyhood, in His Manhood, she must suffer on account of Him. He was her Child; but the time was soon coming when Mary must take her stand before the world as the Mother of the "Man of Sorrow, acquainted with grief"; and so, in His wisdom and love, He leaves her for three days; she is to be made desolate and forlorn; she is to be prepared by the loving hand of God for that unparalleled sorrow when she will lose Him again by His death upon the Cross. "O Lord, in Thy favour, Thou gavest strength to my beauty. Thou turnest away Thy

face from me and I became troubled. To Thee, O Lord, will I cry; I will make supplication to my God" (Psalm xxix. 8-10).

Our Blessed Lady's soul must have been transfixed with grief when she realized that she had lost her Child. It was a totally unexpected sorrow. Since the return from Egypt she had always lived in His Presence; had watched over Him with wondrous love and devotion; had seen Him grow up in the beauty of childhood; had loved Him tenderly as her Child, adored Him as her Maker. He had been her Treasure on earth; the Spouse of her soul. And now He was gone! What utter desolation must have filled her soul when she understood the loss of her Child. She was so certain her Son was with the party; but now, when they seek Him at the end of that long day's journey, Mary perceives, with indescribable dismay, that He is not to be seen; cannot be found! "Whither is Thy Beloved gone, O thou most beautiful amongst women?" With deep anxiety she questions many; but none can give her any information about her Child. Though both she and St. Joseph are worn out with fatigue and anxiety, the search

must be further continued until He is found. "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids."

Mary's sensitive heart was filled with the most terrible fear during those days of separation. Was it in any way her own fault she had lost Him? She experienced the pangs of lost happiness in an overwhelming degree; all that had filled her life was now taken from her; and without any warning. "He hath stript me of my glory, and hath taken the crown from my head" (Job xix. 9). In piteous grief she prayed to God to find her Child. "All the day I cried to Thee, O Lord; I stretched out my hands to Thee" (Psalm lxxxvii. 10). But God seemed very remote, very far away, in those days of poignant sorrow. She was worn out with fatigue, with the wearying journeys to and fro, and with a heart crushed with sorrow. "My tears have been my bread day and night; whilst it is said to me daily, Where is thy God?" (Psalm xli. 4).

Ah! Where indeed was He? Separated from her; lost to her through no fault of her own—she who had never known sin—that we, who are separated from Him by our own sinfulness, may find Him again through her, the "Refuge

of Sinners." She brings back to Him the erring children He has redeemed; and with a mother's love asks Him to have pity on our frailty and weakness—just because we are so weak. She kneels at His Throne and implores Him to pardon our folly and wretched appreciation of His Love. "Thou hast prevented our ruin in the presence of our God" (Judith xiii. 25). She is our Advocate with Him; the dispenser of His Mercies; our Guide, our way to Christ.

I seek and cannot find Him without thee;
Or worship Him or love Him without thee;
For He is thine and evermore with thee.

But always do I find my Love with thee;
For thou didst bring my dearest Love to me;
O bring Him now; O bring thy Son to me.

—Rev. Father Rawes, O.S.C.

"And it came to pass that after three days they found Him." When we lose Our Blessed Lord by our sins, our ingratitude, coldness and neglect, do we seek and find Him, as Mary did; as Magdalen did? Is it a source of great grief to us when we are conscious of our loss? Do we give ourselves any peace or rest until

we are brought into intimate union with Him again through the Sacraments of His Church? Or is our knowledge of Him so slight that we hardly perceive our loss? Do we take it for granted that somehow —almost independently of ourselves—we shall be brought back again to Him? Is there anything vigorous in our search? Or do we erect a barrier between Him and our own souls by our vacillating attitude towards Him? And if we do seek, do we seek and find Him aright? Do we cling to Him with our weakness, or with our strength? Is He the supreme factor of our lives, leading us on to Himself; or One to whom we turn, with confidence, in times of calamity and distress? Do we know Him only in the enunciation of His Law, and not in the revelation of His Love? Do we know Him only as the world's Creator, as the Sun of Righteousness; and not as the "Friend of Sinners"?

Oh! if the world to-day would only seek, and find Him aright! If it would only pour out its tale of sorrow and misery at His Sacred Feet, it could begin its career again strengthened by His sympathy and love. If it would only listen to His words of pity and forgiveness: "I will not

condemn thee; go, and sin no more"; it would have no cause to lament and whine that Christianity has failed it in its hour of need. Christianity can never fail, because of its divine origin, its Divine Founder. When Christianity fails, God will fail! Man, separated from God by his sinfulness, his wilfulness and hardness of heart, has failed to understand Christianity aright; to fulfil its obligations and demands; to interpret its message as Jesus Christ, in the Revelation of His Love, willed it to be received and put into practice. It is in the light of Love—Christianity's gift to the world—that we must examine our conduct towards God and towards our neighbour. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (St. Matthew xxii. 37, 38).

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (St. John xiv. 15). "This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (St. John xv. 12), and "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (St. Jude i. 21).

"And it came to pass that after three days they found Him seated in the midst

of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers."

What a wonderful sight must have met Our Lady's eyes when, at the end of the third day, she found her Child seated in the Temple in the midst of the doctors of the law, astonishing all by His wisdom, His insight into things spiritual, His simplicity ; showing them, as they had never been shown before, how wretched and small was their interpretation of God's word ; revealing whole passages pregnant with meaning which had hitherto escaped them. Our Blessed Lady was amazed at the company she found her Son in, and still more at the wonderful revelation of His power, which had hitherto been concealed in Him and which was now shown forth publicly for the first time, shown forth in the Temple of God, " His Father's house." Here was the first manifestation of His power ; that power which, later on, was to characterize all His works ; " He taught as One having power, and not as the Scribes " ; that power which, apparently destroyed by death, was, nevertheless, to rise above it, supreme over it, victor of it, in His glorious Resurrection.

But Mary, whilst thanking God for this marvellous revelation of His Sovereignty, cannot forget all her terrible anguish of the last three days. "Son," she says pathetically, but with quiet dignity, "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." And her Child answers her. He sees the marks of suffering on her face, its careworn, anxious expression; and His Heart goes out to His Mother with tender love and compassion. "How is it," He asks, "that you sought Me?" "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" "And they understood not the word which He spoke unto them."

They passed out of the Temple away from the wise men; and in lowly obedience and submission to Mary and Joseph, He dwelt in Nazareth with them. The ways of God are unfathomable; and in this simple Child in His lowly home, the mysteries of God ever deepened and deepened.

The Fourth Sorrow

OUR LADY MEETS HER SON CARRYING HIS CROSS

Who is it that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, the beautiful One in His robe, walking in the greatness of His strength? Why, then, is Thy apparel red?—Isaias lxiii. 1-2.

OUR Lady's Sorrows fall naturally into two groups: those connected with the Infancy and Childhood of Our Blessed Lord's Life and those connected with His Passion and Death. If our hearts are wounded for Mary in her first three sorrows, what loving compassion and sympathy must we not feel for her as we contemplate her overwhelming suffering in the closing scenes of her Son's life?

By the time that Mary set out to meet her Son on the road to Calvary, the last stages of His Passion had begun. There had been the terrible agony in the

Garden, when the Lamb of God took upon Himself all the sins of the world in their shame and misery, their humiliation and degradation—the betrayal by one of His own apostles—the pathetic denial of St. Peter—the journeys to Annas, Caiphas and Herod with their attendant cruelties—the mock trial before Pilate—the unjust sentence of death passed upon Him by the Roman Governor—the dolorous carrying of the Cross.

Our Blessed Lady would have heard all that had happened to her Son, and when she learned that the procession was about to set out for Calvary, she went to a spot where she might catch a glimpse of Him before He was put to death. What love Mary must have had to go forth and meet Our Lord in His pitiable condition. Her heart was overwhelmed with grief on hearing all that had been done to her dear Son. She had suffered in union with Him during all His Passion; now she desired to give to Him, and to the Jewish rabble, a public proof of her intense love and pity for Him, and of her belief in Him as the Eternal Son of God. She claimed affinity with Him in His sorrow and distress. She knew what it would cost her to gaze upon Him carrying His Cross;

that all her life the remembrance could never leave her; to see the inhuman treatment meted out to Him whose only crime was that He had cured suffering humanity, time and again, of its ills and miseries. She knew that her heart would break on beholding Him laden with His Cross, bearing the marks of a criminal upon Him; but with a mother's heart she was insensible to her own personal feelings and afflictions. She desired to suffer with her Son; and so, in an ecstasy of love and heroism, she went forth to share, to the last, His agonizing sorrow. Mary took up her place at a point on the road where the procession would pass. And soon—cruelly soon—it came near! And what a scene! First came the guards carrying the instruments of torture for the execution of her Son, coarse and revolting looking, talking in blasphemous language about Him; then the Pharisees on horseback, triumphant and exultant now that they had got Him in their power, and could work their furious hatred and contempt upon Him, followed by the mob; and then—He came!

Our Blessed Lady gazed and gazed with indescribable suffering and dismay, a torrent of love and pity inundating

her soul—aghast at all she saw! Could this be her Child whom she nursed at her breast? Could this be He whom she saved from Herod's ire? Could this be her Son whom she watched over day by day; whom she saw pass from radiant boyhood to glorious manhood? Could this be He who, in the hush and silence of an eastern sunset three years ago, blessed and embraced her in fond farewell before entering on His public life? "Who is it that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra? And why is Thy apparel red?" This Outcast, this "Worm and no man," this "Reproach of His people,"—can this be her Son? Ah! But it is! This is her Son; her Creator; her Redeemer. This is her God. This is her Son who has taken upon Himself the sins of the world; who is paying the penalty of His Love. "In His love and in His mercy He redeemed us." "I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love" (Osee xi. 4). This is He who is the fulfilment of all the prophecies: "Despised and the most abject of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity. He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought Him, as

it were, a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed. The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquities of us all" (Isaias liii. 3-6). "This is a lover of His brethren, and of the people of Israel; this is He that prayeth much for His people" (2 Machabees xv. 14). This is Sin's Victim; Sin's Atonement. And in this terrible guise Mary sees her Son, the "most beautiful among the children of men." "There is His strength hid; death shall go before His Face" (Habacuc iii. 5).

She sees Him in His own garments, dyed with His Blood, bleeding still from the cruel scourging—that most excruciating agony borne for our most shameful sins; staggering under the weight of the Cross, exhausted, livid; tortured in every limb; weighed down and almost annihilated by the burden of our sins; the Creator of the world an oblation for the sins of His children. His eyes seek hers in the dense throng. He raises His weary, thorn-crowned Head and looks at His sinless Mother with intense meaning and expression; with unutterable pathos

and love, as He looks at us when we sin and rebel against Him, the crucified "Man of Sorrows." Mary looks at her Son, broken-hearted; and sees the pain, the prayer in His Eyes; the glorious and wondrous light of self-sacrifice and love. They do not speak to one another; there is no need to. They understand one another so perfectly that speech would have been purposeless. He spoke to, and admonished the Daughters of Jerusalem; in His consideration for His Mother, He is silent. But hearts speak louder than words. In that glance from her Son, Mary's sorrow reached its height. She saw before her the "Man of Sorrows," "the Suffering Servant of Jehovah"; and though her heart was broken at the sight, how she must have thanked God for His boundless love for men. In her love and gratitude she must have tried to reach Him, to thank Him for His great love for us who, in spite of our Saviour's death, still sin and sin against Him. "This is our God, and there shall be no other accounted of in comparison with Him" (Baruch iii. 36). Fain would she have knelt to Him in love and gratitude; fain would she have rendered to her God a public act of adoration and homage.

But she cannot get near to Him ; cannot approach Him. She is forced back by the hostile crowd ; and she, who had nursed Him at her breast, cannot comfort Him now ! Veronica may approach and offer her sweet sympathy ; but His Mother may not have any such consolation. She must drink the cup of bitterness to the dregs ; she must be worthy of her Son.

And with what heroism Our Blessed Lady endured her sufferings. Knowing the agony which would come upon her on beholding her Son on His way to His Death, she yet went out to meet Him—went out to *meet* her cross ! The world would so easily have pardoned her had she spared herself her dreadful sufferings. It would so readily have understood her reticence in shrinking from witnessing the harrowing spectacle of the "Man of Sorrows," in refraining from beholding the crucifixion of her Son. But Mary, with her love and courage, spared herself nothing. She went to her God in her suffering and pain. It drew her nearer to Him. She took up her cross and followed Him, gaining strength from Him who carried His Cross for us so patiently and lovingly.

When God, as our loving Father, sends us suffering to alienate us from the empty and transitory pleasures of this world, to liberate us from the capricious tyranny of human affections, to draw us permanently to His own abiding love, how do we receive it? Has suffering wrought disaster in our lives because we have not understood it aright, failing to perceive its purpose; because in our pride we have refused to unburden ourselves to God about it? Have we merely taken up our Cross, but refused to *follow* Our Blessed Lord? Have we become rebellious because we cannot rid ourselves of suffering? Have we ruined our lives by our want of generosity to the Son of God who died a most cruel death that He might save us from eternal death; who crucifies us "that we may love the Crucified more"; who, in suffering and desolation, draws souls to His Sacred Heart in the intimate revelation of His Love; who offers us suffering in this short life of ours that in heaven, for all eternity, He may crown us with the inestimable gift of Himself?

The procession passed on after Mary had met her Son on His way to Calvary, and He is lost to her again. His pathetic figure is hidden by the rabble in front

and behind Him. But in that moment of meeting with her Son, Mary has lived through years; and though He passes away from her, leaves her that He may go to His Death, He is nearer and dearer to her than He has ever been before, because of His bitter sufferings, His unrequited love for men. She must follow Him at any cost, scorning the jeers and insults of the crowd, for her Son has need of her. In His sufferings Christ desires His Mother. "The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and mourning in spirit" (Isaias liv. 6). And so, a victim of love to her Son, a martyr in His cause, plunged in sorrow and grief, sublime in her resignation and submission, she follows Him up the path of her love, up the path of His Love, to Calvary's awful doom. "I will follow Thee whcresoever Thou goest" (St. Luke ix. 57). "In what place soever Thou shalt be, my Lord and King, either in death, or in life, there will Thy servant be" (2 Kings xv. 21).

The Fifth Sorrow

OUR LADY SEES HER SON DIE

Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me.—Job xix. 21.

"NOW there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother." In this one simple sentence, with its pathos and reticence, St. John relates the tragedy of Our Lady's life. Her sufferings culminated in the supreme sacrifice of her Son on Calvary when she stood beneath His Cross and watched His sufferings, unable to relieve or comfort Him in any way; and adding, in a measure, to His sufferings by her very presence.

What an agony of pain must have passed over Mary's soul when she raised her eyes and looked at her Divine Son on the Cross. What did His Mother see? Only one day before, and Christ had been the "most beautiful amongst the children

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of men." He had left the supper-room in Jerusalem in the perfection of His manhood. St. John had leaned on His Sacred Breast carried away by love and the wondrous attraction of His Personality. St. Peter had offered to lay down his life for Him. The crowd in the Garden of Gethsemani had fallen to the ground at the first sight of Him. And now—"Behold the Man!" Mary sees her Son dying a criminal's death, hanging in torments between two thieves, nailed to a cross in bitter pain; His Sacred Body covered with wounds: "From the sole of His Foot unto the top of His Head there is no soundness therein" (Isaias i. 6). His Head crowned with thorns; His Eyes closed in pain; Blood flowing from His lacerated Hands and Feet—and His Mother remained by His Cross until Death, at last, took pity upon Him and drew Him away from His own creation which had crucified Him.

Oh, Mary! how could you have witnessed such a scene! Ah! you are His Mother; you learned suffering and sacrifice from Him; learned it because of your perfect love for Him; and in the strength of that love you take up your stand at the foot of the Cross as the Mother of

Sorrows, as the World's Heroine, as the "Queen of Martyrs." Peerless among women, peerless among all the Saints of God, crowned with modesty, purity and sinlessness, you are enabled to watch for three hours the most terrible death the world has ever witnessed, and that—the death of your Child, God's Eternal Son. If Mary had loved less, if she had been less perfect, she surely would not—or could not—have been a witness to the death of her Son. She was supreme, unparalleled in her love and heroism; and all her fortitude and love sprang from her very sinlessness; yet she, who throughout the whole of her life had never sinned, who had never been defiled by the least stain of sin, was called upon to suffer for it in sacrificing her Son and in witnessing His Passion and Death. "The life of love is a life of sorrow." "But He knoweth my way, and has tried me as gold that passeth through fire" (Job xxiii. 10).

After Our Blessed Lord had prayed to His Heavenly Father to pardon His murderers and promised Paradise to the repentant thief, He spoke to His Mother. He looked down with His Eyes full of tears at the sad face of His gentle Mother,

whose heart was broken with grief. "Woman," He said, "behold thy Son." And looking down on the disciple whom He loved, He added: "Behold, thy Mother." Jesus Christ desired that Mary should co-operate with Him in the great work of man's Redemption; and His dying gift to earth was the gift of His own Mother. Mary is the Mother of God because we are sinners, and because we need her so much. That is our claim to her. As she stood at the foot of the Cross during those hours of agony and woe, she realized, by reason of her own sinlessness, the awful debt which the Son of God owed to His Eternal Father when He took upon Himself the sins of the world. His Life was pledged; His Sacrifice was offered, that the Justice of God might be appeased; that full and perfect satisfaction might be made to the outraged Majesty of God for the sins of men; that the spotless holiness of God might be made manifest to the world to the end of time. Our Blessed Lady, participating in the Sorrows of her Son, in the ignominy and desolation of His Death, participated also in His love for men; and closely allied with Him in the Redemption of mankind, took the sinful children of

earth to her loving heart and became our Mother. She gave up her Son and took us. That was her sacrifice.

> Mother of God, He broke thy heart
> That it might wider be;
> That in the vastness of its love
> There might be room for me.

On Calvary's purpled hill Mary opened her immaculate heart to the sin-afflicted children of Eve; and she shows us the way, in the misery of our sinfulness, to the boundless, depthless, fathomless love of God. "What more could I do for you that I have not done? What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" (Isaias v. 4).

As Our Blessed Lord's sufferings became more and more intensified by the approach of death, Mary suffered more and more. Every wound, mark and bruise in her Son's Body was repeated in her soul. She entered into every phase of His agony and was immersed in grief. "To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction; who shall heal thee?"

(Lamentations ii. 13). She was inconsolable; none could heal her, for her Son was dying in agony between two thieves, scorned and derided with the shadow of death upon Him—repudiated by His own nation, disowned even by common humanity. "I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people" (Psalm xxi. 7). Our Lady heard the blasphemous language of the executioners as they lingered round Calvary, the scornful remarks of the Pharisees as some rode up on horseback to witness His torture; saw the men, not far distant from her, casting lots for His garments; witnessed the disdain and contempt of the Roman soldiers as they gazed upon the Nazarene; and her sorrow knew no bounds. "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even to my soul" (Psalm lxviii. 2).

After He had uttered His third word, our dear Lord was silent for some time; and darkness, strange and intense, fell upon the earth, typical of the darkness which had come upon His Soul. His Soul was a sea of agony, an ocean of pain; for in the work of man's Redemption not only must He surrender His Body to be crucified, but His Soul must be crucified

also. Nothing was spared Him; He Himself willed that nothing should be spared Him. He was Sin's Captive; Sin's Atonement; and in the height of His agony He uttered that heart-rending cry: "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "And there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother." His Mother—the Mother of His Mind and Soul—who understood, as only she could, the true character of the sufferings which God was inflicting upon His Son, and hers, as atonement for the sins of men.

A plaintive cry came from the lips of the dying Christ. "I thirst." "I thirst for men's love." Down through the centuries He looked and He saw every one of us with our faults and failings, our sins and iniquities which He has forgiven so often and so generously in the Sacrament of Penance; saw us with our ingratitude and indifference; and He loved us in spite of this, loved us in spite of ourselves, though by the very intensity of His Love He was breaking His own Heart. "Whom hast thou reproached, and whom hast thou blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel" (Isaias xxxvii.

23). "Oh! the sorrow of sinfulness, the gate to pain," to cause the death of Jesus Christ, the "most beautiful among the children of men."

Has the Crucifixion of the Son of God any special claims upon us as Catholics in our daily lives, privileged as none others are to know Him in the Sacrifice of the Mass, in the tender love of His Sacraments? Does He not plead with each one of us for a deeper recognition of His love, a more fervent, generous response to it? Does He not ask that there shall be a daily sacrifice in our lives of self—of our will, our affections, for Him; that there shall be an annihilation of our pride, cowardice and insincerity; that we should die to self, and live with Him? Does He not ask for a more intense, more enduring hatred of Sin; not only of grave, serious sin, but also of those lesser ones which we call "venial"; which, perhaps, we commit with so much ease and facility; to the habits of which we have, perchance, so long accustomed ourselves; which we perceive so casually and excuse so lightly?

Our dear Lord uttered His two last words very soon after one another. The hour of His Death had now come; there was nothing more that He could suffer

for men. Love—even the love of the Son of God—could go no further. "In His love and in His mercy He redeemed us"; and His Mother had given Him up for the Redemption of the human race. Our Saviour looked down upon her for the last time; and shortly afterwards He cried: "It is finished." "And bowing down His Head, He gave up the ghost."

Nature became convulsed at the death of her Creator. Men fled from the terror and panic of the earthquake, the sight of graves opening and giving up their dead; unnatural darkness covered the earth; fear took possession of the crowd: "Indeed, this was the Son of God." And at the Foot of the Cross, keeping her vigil of sorrow, her heart broken with grief, "there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother."

The Sixth Sorrow

OUR LADY RECEIVES THE DEAD BODY OF HER SON

O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.—Lamentations i. 12.

JESUS was dead; but Mary did not die with Him. Upon her descended an agony which did not kill, and, not dying, yet she was crucified in her sixth great sorrow. Whilst Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were engaged in taking Our Lord's Body down from the Cross, Mary sat at the foot of the Cross in poignant sorrow and grief, reflecting within her all the scenes of her Son's Passion and Death; thinking of all she had witnessed, all she had heard; praying to God to support her in her desolation. "Look Thou upon me, and have mercy upon me; for I am alone and poor" (Psalm xxiv. 16).

In utter desolation and anguish of spirit she watched Joseph and Nicodemus release the Body of her Son from the Cross; and when It was finally lowered to the ground, how tenderly she must have stretched forth her hands, and how piteously, to receive It. Oh! sad and mournful Virgin-Mother! Has the world, in its whole record of suffering, any more touching picture to show us than that of Mary on Calvary's blood-stained hill with the mangled Body of her Son in her arms —slain by the world's sins, killed by His own love! Surely if we are human at all, if we have a grain of pity in our natures, we must give it to this desolate Mother, whose Son we took from her and crucified, whose Heart we broke by our sinfulness, our wantonness and ingratitude. "Let my eyes shed down tears day and night, and let them not cease because the Virgin-Daughter of my people is afflicted with a great sorrow" (Jeremias xiv. 17). As Mary had no equal in her love for her Son, so she had no equal in her sorrow. Human effort can never succeed in adequately portraying the sorrow of Mary when she received the lifeless Body of her Son in her arms. We can only marvel at her power, her capacity, for suffering;

at her profound submission and conformity to the Will of God, at her invincible patience and constancy.

But God did not consider Mary's sufferings too great since they were endured at the Foot of the Cross, and through them she became a partaker in the Passion of her Divine Son; but oh! how her heart was wrung with sorrow on beholding Him in her arms. He went from her in all the beauty of His manhood; she received Him back a mangled corpse. "My sorrow is above sorrow; my heart mourneth within me" (Jeremias viii. 18).

We can imagine that at first she could not speak; she could only gaze and gaze at the Body of her Son in an abandonment of love and sorrow. When at last she could speak—when words came to her at all—she murmured in tones of heart-piercing grief: "My Son! my Son!" At last Our Blessed Lady could embrace Him, could weep over His Wounds, and by manifestations of affection could show Him her ardent pity and love. And He has great need of love; for truly the world has not loved Him. Look at what it has done to Him. "Lo! this is our God"; and yet, "They have

done to Him whatsoever they had a mind" (St. Matthew xvii. 12). His Body is a mass of wounds; there is not a sound place in Him: "We have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted"; there are cruel, gaping wounds in His Hands and Feet; the red wound in His side penetrating to the Heart of the world's Redeemer; His Head is crowned with thorns; His Body bruised and torn, crushed and mangled from the awful scourging; He is scarcely recognizable in His afflictions—and this outraged, insulted, dishonoured Body is the Body of the Eternal Son of God, with the Godhead still within It! "O, my people, what have I done to thee, or in what have I molested thee? Answer thou Me" (Micheas vi. 3).

As Our Lady realized all the terrible sufferings which her Son had endured in His Passion and Death, her soul was well-nigh crushed with pain, and death might well indeed have been a glad release to this agonized Mother. "I am come into the depths of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me" (Psalm lxviii. 3). But Mary did not die. She was to teach us how we should bear our sufferings, to draw us to her in our sorrows, to pass

through every phase of suffering herself, and then to meet her Son again as the Risen Christ, the Conqueror of Death, the Healer of Pain, the Source of Joy.

When we receive Our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion, when He comes to us in His tender love, do we give Him the adoration which Mary poured out over His mangled, bleeding Body? Does the thought of His Death remind us of our own? We are always receiving from God—do we ever give Him anything in return? Do we give Him our whole selves in return for the gift of His Body and Blood? "He asks so little that He may give so much." Do we mourn over our sins with Him in Holy Communion as Mary mourned over the sins of the world when she saw the havoc wrought in Him by sin, and see our own sins amongst the mass of wounds with which His Sacred Body was bruised and torn? "What are these wounds that I see in the midst of Thy Hands? With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved Me" (Zacharias xiii. 6). Do we understand that by His wounds ours are healed, that His sorrow softens ours; that in the moment of Holy Communion

He comes to us with all the merits He acquired by His Sufferings ; do we ever think of all He had to endure before He gave Himself to us in Holy Communion ? " Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her, for her evil is come to an end, her iniquity is forgiven ; she hath received of the hand of the Lord double for all her sins " (Isaias xl. 1-2).

With what unutterable tenderness and love must Our Lady have removed, as far as she could, all traces of the outrages which her Divine Son had received in His Sacred Passion and Death ; and though her heart was broken at the sight, her courage never failed her for one moment. As she proceeded with this piteous office, the appalling nature of His Sufferings was more and more revealed to her, together with her Son's love for men. How tenderly would she have held those wounded hands and gazed on those arms which had been opened wide on the Cross —those arms which, to-day, are ever ready to open wide again to receive back the outcast and the sinner. We sin, and He draws us back to His Love in tender forgiveness ; we raise up our hand against

Him, and He stoops down and gives us His Hand to kiss in token of love and forgiveness.

> Bring me to Him who sought on earth for me ;
> Who lived, divinely sorrowful, for me ;
> Thy Son, the Son of God, who died for me.
>
> —Rev. Father Rawes, O.S.C.

The sight of all His sufferings made Mary's heart bleed, and she thought again with compassion of the sinful children of earth whose Mother she had become through the Death of her Son upon the Cross. Jesus Christ gave His Mother to us in His death-agony that she, who had suffered so heavily herself, might help us to bear our sufferings sent to us through God's love. Had any mother ever loved as she, and had anyone ever suffered as she ? " O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow." " The life of love is a life of sorrow." Did she not know every phase, every aspect of Suffering and Desolation ? Was she not the Mother of the " Man of Sorrow " ? There is not a pain or a sorrow, not a grief or a torment which the human heart is capable of bearing, which Mary has not experienced

also. Every one found its way into her heart on that melancholy spring evening when the dead Body of Christ was put into her arms, found their way in and swept in upon her soul till it had no life apart from woe.

Oh, Mary, Queen of Martyrs, if you had only been the Mother of radiant Joy and not the Mother of Sorrow, if you had only caressed the sweet Babe of Bethlehem and not embraced the Crucified Christ, could we love and honour you as we do; could we come to you in our griefs and sorrows with the same confidence and trust as we do now? You understand Sorrow; you are one with us in our griefs. And so we beg your prayers, your aid, in our individual sorrows, both spiritual and temporal; in the cumulative sorrows which press so heavily upon humanity at the present time, in the tragedy of Pain and Suffering which to-day is scourging, cleansing and purifying the world. "This day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity" (Sophonias i. 15).

And to whom can we better turn in our misery to be comforted, to learn patience

and resignation, than to the Divine Victim of Calvary and His Mother, that sad Mother of Sorrow, whose heart, too, was crucified on Calvary?

The Seventh Sorrow

THE BODY OF JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water because the Comforter, the Relief of my Soul, is far from me.—Lamentations i. 16.

THE time had now come for the burial of Jesus, and Mary had to give Him up who had been her whole life to her. The Sabbath was near at hand. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus came forward ; and with love and reverence carried the Sacred Body of Jesus away from His Mother and laid It in the tomb.

In silence, and with broken hearts, the little party of mourners prostrate themselves in adoration before the lifeless Body of Christ. Magdalen's passionate sobs must be hushed for the moment as she gazes upon Him, so beautiful in death. In spite of man's appalling deed, there is the stamp of the Godhead upon

Him. He is a King receiving homage and adoration in death. There is an air of victory about Him now that man has worked his evil will upon Him ; and His triumph is felt by the band of mourners in the midst of their poignant grief. How great and wonderful He has been to suffer so much ; how supreme His Love and Fortitude, His capacity for Pain. How glorious His simple funeral at the end of His kingly life—buried on a hill at close of day ; claiming allegiance from the whole world, overlordship from all humanity. He has no sepulchre of His own ; for He owns the universe. His poverty is the wealth which He gave to the world ; His Love, the treasure which has enriched the earth ; His Death, the Life which has transformed mankind.

But He has to be buried ; and though Mary is aware of the triumph of her Son, her heart is torn with anguish at the thought of losing Him. She embraces His lifeless Form for the last time, and prays by His side to Him, offering to God her sorrow and the agony of her desolation. "Oh, my God, that I could be buried in the grave with Thee : that Thou wouldst keep me hidden alone with Thee. I will bring my sorrow before Thee.

Without Thee the whole world is a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness" (Book of Job).

It was late in the evening when the Childless Mother left the sepulchre, and with her companions made her way from the spot. Calvary still held His Cross dyed with His Blood. Our Lady drew the suffering Magdalen towards her with pity, and slowly they retired together, each thinking of what He had been to her—yet in what a different relationship—and they pondered over the spots hallowed by His sufferings. There—He fell; here—Veronica soothed Him a little; there—the Daughters of Jerusalem wept for Him; and here—ah, here!—His Mother had waited for Him in the strength of her love and had seen Him agonized with suffering. Everything came back to her with a cruel force. Was it only that morning she had met Him? She had lived through an eternity of sorrow since then. Could He be dead? Could man have crucified the Eternal Son of God? Would He not come back to her again? But the plaintive, lifeless tones: "My God! My God! why hast

Thou forsaken Me?" and, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit," rang in her ears—and Mary's sorrow knew no bounds. St. John, with delicate insight into her grief, led her away from the spot to her temporary home.

But home! How could there be a home for Mary without Jesus? She had lost Him once before, it was true; but then He had returned to her, not hurt in any way. And now He had been put to death! In His Love He had prepared her for this deep sorrow and separation from Him; but ah! how bitter it was, how agonizing the sense of loss.

"Whither is Thy Beloved gone, O thou most beautiful among women?" He has gone from you, dear Mother, that the memory of your pain may always remain with you on behalf of your erring children, separated from your Son by the pathetic sinfulness of their lives, that you may aid them and bring them back again into the sunshine of His Love; on behalf, too, of those who, in Death, have proved His friends; who have heard the magic beauty of His Voice and caught a glimpse of your Son in "His white-robed beauty"; but who leave Him, for a time, to suffer for Justice and for Love. And He has

made you their Advocate because you have known the agony of separation from Him; that, remembering your own grief, you may plead at His Throne for those detained in the prison-house of their love.

O help all suffering souls, thou loving one;
And solace give to them, thou loving one;
Remembering thine own pain, thou loving one.

—Rev. Father Rawes, O.S.C.

Our Blessed Lady had shared in the sorrows and griefs of her Divine Son during His Passion and Death. Whilst He was still alive she felt that she could, to some extent, bear her anguish; but when He was dead and buried, when she could no longer be strengthened and supported by His Visible Presence, she felt as if her heart must break. "My tears have been my bread day and night; whilst it is said to me daily, Where is thy God?" (Psalm xli. 4). She had shared in His desolation on the Cross; but now she had her own to bear as well; and without Him it seemed as if her soul was being torn asunder in her bereavement. "He hath made me desolate, and wasted with sorrow all the day long" (Lamentations i. 13). Her Son on the

Cross had felt the supreme loneliness of soul when He cried: "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" May not the Mother have felt some of that loneliness now, when she could say, "My Son! my Son! why hast Thou abandoned me?" Though her love of Him remained supreme and unshaken, and though she knew that ultimately her sorrow would be turned into joy, yet the most terrible desolation descended upon the soul of Mary. "My soul fadeth within me; and the days of affliction possess me" (Job xxx. 16).

During those days of separation from her Son, Mary reviewed His Life and hers. She thought of the wonderful privilege hers had been in possessing as her Son the Incarnate Word made Flesh; of the great dignity conferred upon her through her Virgin-Motherhood; yet in spite of these unparalleled graces, in spite of the perfect manner in which she had discharged her obligations to God in every respect, her efforts, in the face of her Son's Crucifixion and Death, seemed to be a failure. For the moment it seemed as if man had triumphed over his God, his Creator. Christ's enemies had accomplished His Death; He was cold and

impotent in the tomb; and everything looked black and sombre. All through His life Christ had been the embodiment of Love; but mankind, in general, preferred his own sinfulness to the love of the Son of God. Her Son had done His utmost to win the love of men. He yearned so intensely for Love that He died in order to gain it. Love cost Him His life; man crucified Him because He had loved the world so tenderly and pityingly. And when He did get a little love from one of His creatures, even from a profligate sinner, with what graciousness He received it. Look at His treatment of Magdalen. He had not spoken to her from the Cross lest attention might be drawn to her and she might suffer by her past being spoken of in His Presence; but He knew that she was His Penitent, kneeling by His Cross, bewailing her sins once more, washing His Feet again with her tears, offering Him her soul in His agony; knew that her whole being was wrung with passionate grief for Him, understanding now at what a cost her sins had been forgiven her. His dying gaze rested on Magdalen's prostrate form with the deepest sympathy. Her love for Him was the

passport to His Heart; her sorrow, the revelation of His love.

He would do anything for Love; and man had flung it back into His Face when He was in His death-agony, taunting Him with it. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save!" No! In the face of His infinite love for us He was impotent. Love was His Overlord, His King; the one Power in His Life to which He owed allegiance; the one supreme claim upon Him which He was powerless to ignore.

Why had no one come forward to protest against His Death, to save Him from the consequences of His Love? Where were the people who had followed Him about from place to place during the three years of His Public Life? They had crowded into the cities to see Him; had pressed into the wilderness to hear His teaching; had stormed the mountains to witness His Power. They had come to Him in all their ills and miseries to be cured by Him: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean"; "Lord, that I may see"; "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me"—but had one of them been near Him to protect Him, or defend Him when He was

sentenced to death? Oh, yes! perhaps some had been near Him—perhaps quite close; but with the fickleness of human nature, with its appalling ingratitude, they had lifted up their voices and cried: "Not this man, but Barabbas. Away with Him! Crucify Him!"

"Crucify Him!" And the whole scene rose again in Mary's mind until her agony and desolation overwhelmed her as with a boundless ocean of woe, and the Mother of God was confronted with an intensity of sorrow such as the world has never known, and which we can never truly fathom. But in the commemoration of Mary's Sorrows, in this devotion to the "Queen of Martyrs," let us find our refuge and our help. As the Mother of Sorrow, as the Mother of "the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief," she makes her tenderest, deepest appeal to us. We have all known suffering, especially in these last few years. Let our sorrows bring us to Mary and unite us to her in the bond of love, for her whole life was one of suffering because of her intense love for her Son, "the despised and most abject of men." "The life of love is a life of sorrow." In her greatness in heaven, Mary cannot forget her poor

children redeemed by the Precious Blood of her Son who weep and mourn "in this vale of tears," mourning the loss of our loved ones, sorrowing over life's anguish and tragedies to-day.

"Oh, Mary, Mother of Sorrows, we cast ourselves upon thy breast. Our hearts are often wounded and broken with the pains of this life. Console us, strengthen us. Queen of Martyrs, we implore thee by thy sorrows, by the sword which pierced thy soul on Calvary, by the tears with which thou didst bathe the lacerated Body of thy Son, be thou here below our strength and our consolation. Help us to support the ills of this life; and let us enter with thee into the mystery of sorrow, the sorrow which is the crucible wherein the soul is purified and becomes worthy of God, the sorrow which is the fertile seed of the glory and the joys of eternity."

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